



American Recovery and Reinvestment Act U.S. Forest Service



Project Proposal Evaluation and Review Strategy

More than 2700 projects, totaling almost \$4 billion, were submitted by Forest Service Regions, Stations, and Area (R/S/A) for potential funding as enacted by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for capital improvement and maintenance (CIM), wildland fire management (WFM) on federal lands, and wildland fire management on state and private lands. Key criteria were used to ensure projects funded will provide jobs for people in economically distressed communities that will accomplish mission work for the Forest Service.

Project Solicitation:

Direction guiding project submission was issued by the Chief of the Forest Service on February 11, 2009 to all R/S/As in order to prepare a spending plan within 30 days of the Bill being signed into Law, and to provide the Department of Agriculture with a subset of projects that could be underway within the first seven days of enactment. RSAs were requested to ensure that projects submitted for ARRA funding met as many of these criteria as possible and were requested to submit projects in ranked order:

- Create or retain jobs in economically distressed areas.
- Create or retain sustainable jobs.
- Create or retain jobs that help sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands.
- Leverage other resources to create more jobs.
- Create jobs that invest in or leverage the investments of partners, in wood-to-energy or biomass projects, or other Administration initiatives intended to help transform urban and rural economies.
- Create jobs that contribute to sustainable operations, including reducing footprint of infrastructure and/or greener operations of administrative and recreation sites, roads, trails, fire and other facilities.

Evaluation and Review Process:

1. Primary Requirements

- To ensure the selected projects met the criteria described above, a map tool was used to assist in project reviews.
- The key map layers used were: economic distress, fire risk (WFM only), and insect and disease risk (WFM only).

2. Technical Review

- A Deputy Area Point of Contact (POC) in each of the three Deputy Areas (i.e., National Forest System - NFS, State and Private Forestry – SPF, and Research and Development – R & D) led the technical review of projects meeting primary requirements.
- Each Deputy area used a rating system to evaluate individual projects in each of the major categories (CIM-facilities, CIM-roads, CIM-trails, CIM-abandoned mine sites, WFM-biomass, WFM-NFS, WFM-SPF, and WFM-R&D) in terms of the project's contributions to primary requirements and their ability to contribute to the intent of the act.
- This resulted in a recommended list of up to 110% of projects in each fund category: CIM, WFM-state and private lands, WFM-federal lands, and Biomass for review and recommendation by Staff Directors.

3. WFM Rating – conducted by SPF Deputy Area POC and R & D Deputy Area POC

- A composite map layer that included Wildland Fire Potential (25% weight), Insect and Disease Opportunities (25% weight) and Economic Indicators primarily driven by unemployment data (50% weight) was developed. Each county in the country was then rated and ranked using a composite of established economic criteria and ecological data and received a composite score between 0 and 100.
- WFM-Federal lands also considered: jobs creation; start time and duration; readiness; regional priorities; contributions to changes in land condition; and potential for stewardship contracting.
- WFM-State and private lands proposals were additionally reviewed for fit with the intent of the law and separated into: 1) an “A-List” including proposals that are consistent with the legislation and generally fall into the top half of the technical ratings (rated between 50 and 100); and 2) a “B-list” that included all other proposals. In order to meet the ARRA objectives for SPF, proposals that included the following attributes were avoided: wildland fire suppression; volunteer fire assistance; purchase of wildland fire suppression equipment; inventory and monitoring activities; landscaping; new facilities construction; and general education and training.
- Biomass projects were also reviewed against the following merit criteria: technical feasibility, jobs, economic depression of identified counties, supply conflict, and readiness (timing).

4. CIM Rating – conducted by CIM Deputy Area POC

- CIM project proposals included road, bridge and trail maintenance and decommissioning; related watershed restoration and ecosystem enhancement projects; and facilities improvement, maintenance and renovation; and remediation of abandoned mine sites.

- The determination of how and where ARRA funds for CIM were to be distributed was based on criteria that would insure projects: fully met the intent of ARRA, would produce jobs located in the areas of the most economic distress, and would result in significant resource benefits (i.e., natural resources and/or reducing future operating costs – costs of land management or deferred maintenance).
- CIM project reviews also considered project capacity to benefit a diverse array of workers.

5. Final Decisions by Executive Leadership Team (ELT) for Investment of ARRA Funds

- ELT will make final decisions on overall project mix and portfolio.
- ELT will review final project proposals and make investment decisions for consistency with ARRA requirements and alignment with agency strategic direction and priorities.
- This process is being guided by the following criteria:
 - Meeting the requirements of ARRA.
 - Creating or retaining jobs in areas of most economic distress (top 50% of distressed areas).
 - Resulting in resource benefits, addressing fire potential, addressing insect and disease issues and/or reducing future costs.
 - For the last ten percent of funds, in addition to the above, consideration was given to projects where significant resource issues existed, additional capacity to reduce deferred maintenance and operating costs was possible and contribution to the General Provisions in the Act (such as youth programs and Job Corps) was likely.
- WFM programs of work on state and private lands will be largely delivered through State and Tribal partners through Federal Financial Assistance Agreements. ELT will be approving proposed programs of work, however specific project selections will be made by State and Tribal partners.